

THE BACK ROOM

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FADE IN:

INT. THE BACK ROOM - DAY

Dimly lit. Piled with family storage and desolate computer parts. Windows covered with foil. In the corner, a hutch desk with ancient PC. Around it are mountains of porn DVDs and on the walls posters of porn stars. A few of them are signed.

One of the posters is nearly life-sized, a dominatrix supervising the room's activities.

A hefty man hunches toward the glowing computer screen. This is HAROLD, mid sixties. He wears baggy clothes and he'd prick like a porcupine if you touched him.

On the computer screen a camera explores a PORN ACTRESS, still in her street clothes.

Harold peers over his glasses, leans in.

He unbuttons his pants.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Messy counters, dingy windows. Through a doorway, Harold sits at the computer.

On the stove, a pot simmers, then boils.

The kitchen table is set nicely with an Autumn table runner, antique gravy boat and butter dish, and five place settings.

INT. THE BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The Porn Actress flips up her dress.

Harold leans back. He puts himself back in order, and ejects the DVD. He hears the HISS of the pot spilling over and jumps up.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

He sees the pot and panics, turns off the burner. He checks the oven.

A nearly-done roasted chicken inside.

Harold hears a CAR pull up outside. He looks out the window and sees a nice SUV in the driveway. STACY and MARK step out of the front seats.

Harold looks overjoyed to see them, then he looks back at the chicken. He bites his lip. He closes the oven and turns the heat up nearly to five hundred degrees.

DOORBELL DINGS

Harold quickly locks the door to the back room and hides the key above the door frame.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Harold scans the room: a pair of socks on the floor. He shoves them under the couch.

He pulls a basket of McDonald's toys and blocks from the corner into the open.

INT. FRONT DOOR - DAY

Harold opens the door on Stacy, early thirties, holding CARA, six. Beside them Mark, thirties, and TERRY, eight. Stacy looks tight-faced. She doesn't smile. Cara hides in Stacy's shoulder. Mark clutches a pie tight enough to dent the foil pan.

STACY
Happy Thanksgiving... Dad.

HAROLD
Hey!

TERRY
(too quick)
Hi Grandpa!

Terry speeds past him to the basket of toys.

STACY
Cara. Say hi.

Cara buries her face in Stacy's shoulder.

MARK
I'll go set this down.

Mark heads to the kitchen. Stacy and Harold shuffle awkwardly.

Harold's awkward grin.

Stacy watching the floor.

Harold goes to the toys. He picks out an ancient Barbie.

He shows the Barbie to Cara. She slowly creeps out of her shell, then grabs for it.

Everyone smiles hesitantly.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Harold sits on the floor with Terry and Cara. It's Barbies versus dinosaurs. Behind them Mark and Stacy sit side by side on the couch.

Cara's Barbie talks to Harold's Barbie. Terry's T-rex climbs up Harold's back. After a second, the T-rex forcibly bites his ear.

TERRY

RAWR!

STACY

Terry!

HAROLD

Ouch!

Stacy's pulls Terry away by his arm.

MARK

Oh Harold you're bleeding!

HAROLD

Oh. I'll just go get a band-aid.

He pushes himself up, goes to the kitchen.

Stacy and Mark get down on Terry's level.

STACY

(to Terry)

You don't want to hurt Grandpa.

MARK

(to Terry)

You can't do that kiddo.

TERRY

(pouting)

It was T-rex.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Harold searches in a cabinet for a band-aid: nothing. He spies the door to the back room. He looks over his shoulder. He reaches up above the door frame, gets the key, unlocks the door.

CARA (O.S.)
Grandpa are you okay?

Harold turns around. He's sweating.

Cara stands right behind him.

He gets a paper towel and presses it to his ear. It's only lightly bleeding.

HAROLD
I'm okay.

CARA
Terry hurts me a lot. He lets me hit him when he hurts me so I won't tell Mom. Do you want to hit Terry?

Harold picks her up.

HAROLD
No. Of course not. It was an accident. You shouldn't hit Terry.

CARA
He hurts me so I get to hurt him.

HAROLD
Still. Isn't it kind of mean?

CARA
Maybe.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Harold enters holding Cara. He looks softer, more grandfatherly. Terry rushes him, hugs him.

TERRY
(muffled)
Sorry Grandpa.

HAROLD
It's okay, Terry. It was an accident.

He settles onto the couch with Cara on his knee. Terry stands in front of him, gently poking Cara to get her attention. Harold mediates happily.

Stacy watches Harold for a second. She slowly smiles. She softens, relief washes over her.

STACY

Dad, what're you doing still in
this old house?

Harold stops, but doesn't look at her.

HAROLD

Never thought about leaving, I
guess.

STACY

Ever thought about moving closer to
us?

BEEP BEEP BEEP the smoke alarm!

Harold sets Cara down and trots into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A tendril of smoke twirls from the oven. He opens it: the chicken is smoking heavily.

HAROLD

Oh no!

STACY (O.S.)

Is it burnt?

Harold waves the smoke away. The chicken is a piece of charcoal. Stacy peers into the oven beside Harold.

STACY (CONT'D)

Oh. Dad.

HAROLD

Yeah. It's ruined.

STACY

We could all go out for Chinese or
something?

HAROLD

I'll go buy a turkey.

STACY
It'll take too long.

Stacy walks into the living room.

Harold locks the door to the back room and hides the key.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Terry and Cara are playing.

Harold enters, looks at Mark.

HAROLD
You guys could bring Chinese back here? I'll watch the kids.

Beat.

MARK
You sure?

HAROLD
Yeah.

STACY
I think we should take them with us. They get a little wild.

MARK
They play rough, can't leave 'em alone.

HAROLD
It's okay. We'll be fine. Promise.

Stacy gives him a long, searching look.

STACY
Okay. We'll be back.

Stacy and Mark get their coats and head out. From the door-

STACY (CONT'D)
We'll be right back.

TERRY
Bye, Mom.

CARA
Bye-bye.

Stacy watches them as she closes the door.

Harold lowers himself onto the couch. He watches them play for a second. His eyes flick toward the door to the back room. He swallows hard.

Terry's dinosaur makes its way over Cara's legs toward her family of Barbies. The dinosaur pounces on the Barbies.

HAROLD

Terry. Please play nice.

Terry's dinosaur pulls back to bite Terry's hand.

Harold wrings his hands in his lap. He's struggling. He looks over-

DOOR TO THE BACK ROOM

Is like a black hole in the house.

HAROLD

Bites his lip.

HAROLD

I have to go check on something.
I'll be right back.

He goes to the kitchen.

INT. BACK ROOM - DAY

Door swings open, revealing Harold. Each step in he bristles, becoming more and more on edge.

He sits down at the computer. A sliver of light comes in from the kitchen. He glances at the poster, as if getting confirmation for his actions. He rises and shuts the door.

Black.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The kids are surrounded by a disaster zone of toys.

Terry zooms cars along the couch.

Cara plays with a plastic dinosaur. The dinosaur attempts to eat a plastic car.

Terry eyes her viciously.

TERRY
Dinosaurs can't eat cars!

He pushes her over. THONK her head against the floor. Cara cries.

Terry looks her over, crosses his arms.

TERRY (CONT'D)
Cara, stop crying. Don't you want
to hit me?

She rolls over. There's bit of blood in her hair.

CARA
My head hurts!

Terry leans over, pulls her up.

TERRY
You're bleeding. I'll get Grandpa.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

He runs into the kitchen, doesn't see Harold. He's frantic. He grabs a few paper towels.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cara sits up, holding her head. Terry presses the paper towels to her head.

CARA
Ow!

TERRY
Hold on!

Terry sprints into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

He tries the door to the back room. It opens.

Terry, in the doorway, eyes jumping around.

INT. BACK ROOM - DAY

The posters of topless women, the signed pictures.

Harold sweats, masturbating in front of the computer.

Porn MOANS and GRUNTS.

TERRY

Grandpa? What are you doing?

Harold makes eye contact with his grandson.

Terry's shocked face. He spins around, back to Cara.

Harold looks around the room, ashamed.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Cara lies on the floor. Terry pats Cara's arm, comforting.

Stacy and Mark enter with a bag of food.

STACY

What happened?

Terry gapes, unsure what to say.

STACY (CONT'D)

Where's Grandpa?

Cara holds her arms up and Mark takes her. Stacy storms into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She pounds on the back room door.

STACY

Dad! You weren't watching them!

She slings the door open.

INT. BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Harold sits in front of the computer, head in his hands. The porn still plays.

STACY

I thought you were done with this?
I can't have the kids stay here
when you're doing that!

She runs away.

Harold hops up and goes after her.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Stacy puts the kids coats on. Harold stumbles in.

HAROLD
Stacy. Wait.

STACY
Dad, you're sick.

She gives him a shriveling look and storms out the door with Cara. Mark and Terry follow. Terry looks back at Harold. He doesn't want to leave. Mark shuts the door.

Harold stands alone in the living room. He twitches, starts crying. He's ruined it.

INT. BACK ROOM - DAY

Harold rushes to the computer. He pushes the monitor off the desk. It crashes to the floor. It's not enough. He kicks the CPU until it's just parts. He slings the DVDs around.

Harold pauses, looks up at the dominatrix.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

At the stove, he turns on all the burners. The flames pop to life. He sets a pan on it and fills it with oil. He leaves it on the stove.

On the stove, the oil smokes.

INT. BACK ROOM - DAY

Harold stands in the center of the room. He looks around at the posters as smoke fills the room.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The pan bursts into flames, spouting a huge fire engulfing the cabinets.

It spreads to the nicely set dinner table, melting the plastic table runner.

EXT. HAROLD'S HOUSE - EVENING

Harold exits the house. He stops in the center of the yard, turns, and watches the house.

The kitchen window is engulfed in flame. Smoke trickles out the windows and billows out the door.

Harold watches the house burn. A neighbor runs up to him. Harold ignores him; he's intent on the house.

EXT. HAROLD'S HOUSE - LATER

The house is mostly on fire. A fire truck and fluorescent firefighters stand in the yard, hosing it down.

On the back of an ambulance, Harold sits with an emergency blanket around him. He watches the house burn with something near reverence. He looks over-

Stacy and Mark push through the crowd of onlookers.

STACY

Dad. What happened?

HAROLD

Had to get rid of it.

Stacy watches his expression.

Harold seems less prickly. He smiles.

FADE TO BLACK.